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ABSTRACT

An attempt was made to develop a conceptual model to explain and predict why sports are differentially preferred by the various social classes. Rationale and empirical support were provided that indicated that higher class sports tend to be more costly, individual in nature, and noncontact; they also receive relatively lower exposure or publicity in the culture. Based on these variables, predicted social status scores for 39 sports were generated.
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A THEORY OF SPORT STRATIFICATION

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Introduction

The interrelationship between sport and the socio-cultural system is succinctly identified by Boyle (1) who stated:

Sport permeates any number of levels of contemporary society and it touches upon and deeply influences such disparate elements as status, race relations, business life, automotive design, clothing styles, the concept of the hero, language, and ethical values.

Yet it is only in the last decade that sport has received any serious consideration as a legitimate area of scientific study. One particular structural subsystem which has received some attention by sport sociologists has been the relationship between social class and sport involvement. An early study by McIntyre (12) pointed to a social class influence on participation in contact and nonbody contact sports. McIntyre concluded that participants in contact or combative sports such as football and wrestling were more likely to have been brought up in lower class environments than participants in noncontact sports. Later studies by Luschen (10), Loy (9), Stone (17), Braboy (2) and Yiannakis (20) generally confirm McIntyre's findings and point further to the existence of a relationship between sport participation and social class.

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A major finding of significance in the studies mentioned is the regularity with which several sports have been found to be preferred by specific social classes. Such sports as tennis, gymnastics, swimming, golf and fencing have been shown to be associated with higher status participants while many team and contact sports are mostly associated with lower status participants.

The Problem

While it is important to the body of knowledge to begin a research enterprise by identifying trends and relationships among variables, it is ultimately more productive to transcend the descriptive level if the theoretical scope and import of the findings is to be expanded. Thus, while the evidence in this domain tends to indicate that social class is associated with sport preference, the dynamics and processes associated with this relationship are still obscure. Questions of this nature may quite legitimately be asked: Which components of social class are associated with specific sports? Are there economic factors which limit access to various sports? How are various sports "adopted" by specific social classes? Are there middle class sports? Are there working class sports? Does "taste," a value orientation which appears to be associated with level of education and occupational milieu (3, 5), influence a person's choice of sport?

In view of the preceding discussion, it was the purpose of this study to (a) identify some factors which predispose sports to be differentially preferred by the various social classes and (b) to generate a model which explains and predicts the social status of a selected number of sports.

Theoretical Framework

According to most sociologists, social class is a function of various properties and characteristics which are differentially possessed by members in a given society. Such characteristics as type of occupation, level of education, area of residence, power and prestige have been identified as being associated with specific social classes (6, 7, 11, 18). However, being a member of a certain social class implies more than simply possessing the above-mentioned characteristics. It implies a certain life style, tastes, money, aspirations, and the possession of specific social skills (19). Thus, as type of occupation is probably the greatest determinant of social status (and a major component of social class), it was hypothesized that certain qualities and characteristics in the nature of the occupation a person is engaged in would be similarly sought in the sport in which a person participates. According to various social theorists, one characteristic which differentiates most occupations from professions is the degree of autonomy one has in his work (14). Moreover, Purvis (16) states, "Autonomy entails the exercise...of independent judgement." This being the case, it may be hypothesized that a greater proportion of persons engaged in the professions participate in individual rather than team sports, as the former are more likely to offer the participant the opportunity to exercise his need for autonomy and independent judgement. Furthermore, as professional positions are generally higher status positions (15), i.e., physicians, lawyers, college professors, higher administrative and executive positions, it may be hypothesized that individual sports are more likely to be associated with the higher social classes than team sports.

One rather obvious difference among the social classes is the possession of wealth. As some sports require a large outlay of money, it may be expected that relatively fewer lower status persons are likely to participate in such activities. Thus, it may be hypothesized that the higher the cost of participation, the higher the social class origins of the participants are likely to be.

According to Luschen (10) "the newer the sport (new to the culture) the greater its social status." This hypothesis was generated from data with sport participants in West Germany. After examining the proposition with sports in the U.S.A., however, there were indication that it may be degree of exposure in the culture, in addition to "newness," which may influence the social status of a sport. Thus, while it may be true that innovations of foreign "imports" in the area of sports may be initially adopted by the higher social classes, it would seem that it is the amount of subsequent exposure and publicity that a sport receives which ultimately determines its social position. An example of this is the differential status of soccer and rugby in England. While originally rugby evolved from soccer, we find that soccer is today the sport of the "masses" while rugby is associated with the higher social classes. Thus, while rugby is a newer sport than soccer, it also receives considerably less exposure and publicity than soccer. Extending the proposition further, it may be hypothesized that as rugby receives greater exposure in the culture, its social status is likely to decrease.

As stated earlier, most researchers in sport sociology appear to be in agreement that participants in contact and combative sports tend to come from lower class homes. One explanation may be found in a lower class value orientation stressing a "toughness ethic," an ethic associated with a male

role of toughness, aggressiveness and bravery (8, 13). Clinard and Fannin (4), in investigating the conception of self as male among middle and lower class delinquents, found that, in line with the toughness ethic, the latter perceived themselves as physically "tough," powerful and fearless. Middle class delinquents saw themselves as being more clever and smart and tended to commit crimes involving trickery rather than violence. If it can be argued that lower class subcultures foster the development of this toughness ethic, which among delinquents often finds expression in crimes of violence (4), what better way is there for nondelinquents to display this ethic but in such societally acceptable ways as contact and combative sports? With higher-class persons, coming generally from a system which tends to discourage the display of force and elevates the ability to use one's "brains," it may be expected that higher class participants are underrepresented in contact and combative sports.

In summary, four variables have been identified in this analysis as being influential in determining the social status of a sport. These are: team-individual, cost of participation, degree of exposure in the culture and contact-noncontact sports.

Procedures

In order to test the predictive utility of the model, a priori weights were assigned to the predictor variables as indicated in Table 1. Two methods, both employing product-moment correlation were then used to validate the model. (Insert Table 1)

Method I. A list of fifteen sports for which Loy (9) obtained status scores was employed in this first analysis (the remaining five sports in Loy's list were omitted due to inadequacy of sample size). Based on the

four predictor variables identified earlier, derived status scores (DSS) were generated and these were subsequently correlated with Loy's actual status scores, using the same fifteen sports. This analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of .79 ($p < .01$).

Method II. A sample of 412 male and female students attending a large southwestern state university was employed in this investigation. The sample ranged in age from 17 to 35 years.

The Ss were administered a questionnaire in which they were requested to indicate their degree of preference for 39 sport activities. Their social class origins were also determined using the Hollingshead Two Factor Index of Social Position (7). Subsequently, the social status of each of the 39 sports was obtained based on a value which represented the social class origins of the majority of the participants in each sport. In addition, using the four predictor variables discussed earlier, derived status scores were generated for all the sports in this analysis (Table 2). Product-moment correlation between the two domains (i.e., derived status scores and actual status scores) yielded a coefficient of .75 which was significant beyond the .01 level of confidence. (Insert Table 2)

Discussion

It appears that cross validation of the model with data from two different sources lends support to the proposed theory of social stratification in sport. However, while the theory explains and predicts the social status of a sport with some success, the full scope of its applicability is not yet known. Restrictions imposed by age factors in the test samples, as well as the fact that in the major analysis degree of preference rather than actual involvement was employed, necessitate further replications and testing of the theory.

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TABLE 1
A PRIORI WEIGHTS OF PREDICTOR VARIABLES

<u>Sport Structure</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>Team/Individual</u>	<u>Individual</u>
	3	2	1
<u>Cost</u>	<u>High</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Low</u>
	1	2	3
<u>Exposure</u>	<u>High</u>	<u>Medium</u>	<u>Low</u>
	4	2	1
<u>Sport Nature</u>	<u>Contact</u>	<u>Partial</u>	<u>Noncontact</u>
	3	2	1

TABLE 2

~~MAILED~~ SPORT STATUS "HIERARCHY" (D.S.S.)
 AND CORRELATING SOCIAL CLASS ORIGINS OF PARTICIPANTS

<u>Social Class</u> ^a	<u>Range of Scores</u> (D.S.S.)	<u>Sports</u>
I	5 and under	Archery, Canoeing, Cycling, Fencing, Flying, Golf, Hiking, Rock Climbing, Sailing, Scuba diving, Ski jumping, Sky diving, Snow skiing, Squash, Water skiing
II & III	6-8	Badminton, Bowling, Car racing, Field events, Gymnastics, Handball, Horse racing, Ice skating, Judo, Motorcycle racing, Soccer, Swimming, Table tennis, Tennis, Track events, Water Polo
IV & V	9-13	Baseball, Basketball, Football, Jogging, Karate, Rugby, Volleyball, Wrestling

^aAs indicated by Hollingshead (7).